

[Summer Camp Crush](#) by [Luddleston](#)

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Summary:

Working at a summer camp has its downsides: sunburn, giant insects, constant humidity but too little air conditioning, that cute boy you have a crush on.

Working at a summer camp also has its benefits: nature, beautiful sunsets, easy access to a swimming pool, that cute boy you have a crush on.

Summer Camp Crush

Author's Note:

I worked at a summer camp for 3 years, so I figured I could write this for nostalgia and because maybe if I write enough summer stuff, I'll feel warmer.

Also, this would've been finished way sooner if I didn't dick around trying to decide if I wanted to write a sex scene in it (the decision was no, obviously) soooo Happy Valentine's Day, here's some cute gay content, which, honestly, is the true meaning of Valentine's.

P.S. No, I did not have a cute girl for gay summer camp love.

Every summer.

Every *god damn* summer, Keith got five, maybe ten minutes of quiet to enjoy the perfect blue sky unrolling over the charmingly disheveled campground he spent the spaces between college semesters at. He had less than six-hundred seconds in which to take in the dandelion-spotted lawn from the shade of the gazebo, *maybe* to make it down the trail to the cabin. And then, every summer, that asshole Lance McClain showed up.

When Keith heard the pleasant birdcalls and the hum of the grasshoppers interrupted by the shriek of a whistle for the third fucking year in a row, he dropped his bag on the ground, turned on his heel, and prepared to slap that whistle right out of Lance's mouth.

Unfortunately, Lance was standing right next to Shiro, who *did* have the authority to fire Keith, so he had to weigh his options. God, slapping him in the face still sounded so good. Keith settled for a scathing glare instead, folding his arms over his chest. "Nobody's running on the pool deck, Lance, you can shut the fuck up."

"Keith," Shiro said, in the mild way that meant, *you're not actually doing something wrong, but I'm scolding you anyways, probably because you're*

cursing.

"I swear to god, Shiro, if he doesn't quit blowing that thing I'm going to shove him and his oral fixation out the second-story window."

Neither of them caught the end of Keith's sentence, because Lance interrupted him with another trill of his whistle. It was annoying both because Lance was acting like a child and because that had been a pretty good comeback. God, when was Hunk getting here? Hunk would've high-fived him for that, Lance's best friend or not.

"Lance, tone it down," Shiro said. "Keith, don't shove anybody out a window."

"No promises," Keith said, more to Lance than Shiro, heaving his bag over his shoulder again and lugging it up the stairs to the cabin.

Keith and the other specialists (the people who got to do something other than wrangle children all day) lived in a building by the lake, which was hot, muggy, and conveniently located, because it was situated directly on top of the equipment shed. It gave them easy access to the canoes (for pranks) and the pool floaties (for colorful furniture), until somebody decided to lock up the equipment shed when it wasn't being used for activities. Now, the building was just hot, muggy, and inconveniently located.

The rickety staircase gave way to a front porch that stretched the length of the building. It would've been a nice place to sit and watch the sun set over the lake or some shit, but it was screened in and there were usually a bunch of giant horseflies buzzing around on the other side of the screen.

Inside, somebody already had a fan and a dehumidifier humming along in the common room, and Keith took a minute to stick his face in front of the fan. Even though it was only June, the summer heat had already descended and his hair spent more time sticking to his face than not.

"Oh. Hey, Keith, sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt your reunion with your camp girlfriend."

Keith frowned at Pidge, who had ducked out of one of the curtained-off bedroom doors and sassed him within seconds of seeing him. It was honestly sort of impressive. "Hey. Where's Hunk?"

"No, 'hi, how was your school year' or anything?" Pidge asked, standing next to him to enjoy the oscillating fan, too.

"You're in high school, I just assumed it was bullshit."

"Point."

"So, where's Hunk?" Keith supposed he could've checked their room. It didn't *technically* belong to them, but he and Hunk had shared the same room on the far left corner of the cabin for the last two years. It was the most shaded one, and typically the coolest. Also, furthest from the common room and second-furthest from the bathrooms.

Pidge gave him a condescending eye-roll. "Do you seriously not keep up with anybody while you're away at school?"

"I talk to Shiro sometimes."

"That doesn't count, I bet Shiro's texts sound like corporate e-mails," Pidge said. Not wrong. Shiro had been much easier to talk to when he went to the same university as Keith. "Anyway, Hunk's not here this year. He's a counselor, I think in the yellow cabin? I dunno. Whatever one my brother's in."

"You're kidding me."

Pidge gave him a look that said no kidding was happening. "I mean, you had to know he was gonna switch it up one year. Dude loves kids, and he always talks about how boring maintenance gets."

"Fuck. Who am I gonna room with, then?"

Just then, the door banged open, and Lance hauled two overstuffed bags in at once. "Hey, Keith, are you still in the far back room this year? Cuz I already put some of my stuff in there, hope that's cool." He dropped one of

the bags so he could hug Pidge, and three separate bottles of what all seemed to be hair product fell out.

Shit. The unofficial rooming rules were as follows: whoever puts their stuff in the room first gets it. Keith assumed nobody else wanted to stake claim on rooming with Lance (except for maybe all the girls on staff who were into him—Lance *was* kind of cute), because he was a demon sent straight from hell in the form of a lifeguard. Keith still *technically* had his room. He was just sharing it with Lance. Unless, of course, he told Lance he didn't want to live with him, in which case he'd have to forfeit the best room in the building.

Keith gave up, resigned himself to a summer of listening to Lance's bad music and suffering through general being-a-morning-person. At least if he was close enough, he could steal that fucking whistle and drop it in the turtle tank.

He shuffled grumpily to the back of the building with his overstuffed bag, not bothering to head back down to grab his footlocker right then. Lance had, indeed, already put his stuff in the room, dumped all over the bottom bunk like the first thing he'd done upon reaching camp was ruin the sanctity of Keith's perfect bedroom arrangements. And of course, the second thing he'd done was go to the lodge and find Shiro, probably just because he couldn't find Allura and hit on her.

Keith swung his duffel bag onto the top bunk with a particular level of violence that said he wanted to swing it into somebody's face. Not Lance's, in particular, just somebody's. He didn't like when people threw things at him that he didn't expect. Especially when he could have known about it beforehand and prepared himself for it if he'd just talk to somebody for once in his life.

Lance, intelligently, didn't try to say anything to him as he walked in the room, just let Keith unpack his stuff and make his bed in silence.

There did seem to be some benefits to having Lance as a roommate—he unrolled a rug over the constantly-grimy tile and set his own box-fan rattling away on top of the dresser that neither of them were gonna use—

half the drawers stuck and the rest of them had something sticky in the bottom. By the time Keith hauled his footlocker up the stairs, Lance was re-constructing a metal-framed living chair that was bright turquoise.

"You don't mind the whole top bunk thing, do you?" Lance finally asked, because he was incapable of going more than ten minutes in silence.

"It's cool," Keith said. He'd always been on the top bunk with Hunk anyways, because the metal bunkbeds were a couple decades old and rickety as fuck, and anybody larger than Keith-size might crush one.

"Sweet. I roll around in my sleep, and I fell off one when I was nine and broke my arm so. Top bunk does not happen," Lance said. He was busy unfolding a mattress pad that might as well have been a whole other mattress and setting it on top of his bed. "How long do we have before the opening meeting?"

Keith glanced at his watch. "Like twenty minutes. Why?"

Lance nodded, like that was enough time for whatever ridiculous shit he wanted to do. "Alright, bye! I'm visiting Hunk!"

As soon as he was gone, Keith dropped into the chair (Lance's chair) and faced the fan, enjoying the extra twenty minutes of silence he'd been given. He'd need it to survive Coran's usual start-of-the-summer pep talk.

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Lance thought that by this point in his summer-camp-counselor career, training week was basically useless. He listened to Coran give the same "let's have a great summer!" speech he gave every year, and spent most of it wondering how the hell he always kept his mustache looking like that. Wax? Superglue? Fake mustache? Then, Allura's dad, the owner of the camp, came around for a minute to talk rules and policies, all of which Lance had already heard twice over already. Lance mostly ignored him in favor of taking in the beauty of Camp Arus. The *real* beauty, not the trees, or whatever.

Because, seriously, everybody knew that the real natural beauty of the camp was the assistant director.

Shiro was six-feet-and-change of toned muscle and pure manliness, the kind of guy who would voluntarily spend his weekends exploring the forest and sleeping in hammocks. He went white-water kayaking for fun and could probably win a fight against a grizzly bear. He wore camp T-shirts like he was walking around shirtless and had been known to do pull-ups on the cross-beams on the lodge ceiling. Lance had spent the past two summers cultivating the ultimate counselor-crush on him, and when Shiro got up to introduce himself in a little speech peppered with jokes about camp food and not skinny dipping in the pool, followed by a knowing wink at the lifeguards, Lance just about melted out of his wobbly metal chair.

God, that guy was hot. Lance was gonna have to go dunk his head in the lake after this, which was normal, he was just kind of like that after too much exposure to Shiro. Once, he'd seen Shiro help maintenance cut down a dying maple tree that was close enough to the hiking trails to fall on somebody, and then do that thing where he wiped the sweat off his face with the bottom of his T-shirt. Lance's mouth had gone so dry, he was *still* thirsty.

He hoped they continued that game where you jumped onto somebody's back without warning this year. Sure, it ended up with more and more people jumping onto you until it was just a giant dog-pile, but Shiro always caught him, and that was. Whoa. That was enough, because if anything more than that happened, Lance would literally disintegrate.

Hunk leaned over and elbowed Lance in the arm. "You've been staring at him for the last ten minutes," he whispered.

"He's talking. I'm paying attention."

"To his biceps, maybe."

Hunk wasn't wrong, so Lance didn't retaliate, just kept on paying way more attention than his ADHD usually let him. Of course, it was easy to pay

attention when the object of your focus had great pecs and always wore his shirts a little too tight.

Halfway through a very vivid, pleasant memory of that one time he saw Shiro with a three-day beard after a weekend, Shiro said, "alright, so everybody head to your assigned training areas until we meet up for dinner at six."

Shit. Had someone assigned him a training area? Ugh. Shiro probably said something while Lance was busy drooling over his chest and his cheekbones and his everything.

Everybody got up and headed for the doors, except for Hunk and the rest of the counselors, who congregated around the stage in the lodge. Lance panicked for a second, then tracked down a familiar head of platinum hair. "Allura! Hey! Yo! Where are we supposed to be going?"

She looked at him like he'd asked where the fire pit was. "The pool. Duh. Lifeguard training, Lance."

Oh. Right, his actual job and stuff. "Sweet! Be there in five!"

He took a brief second to run over to the water cooler, which just happened to be where Shiro was talking to Pidge's brother about... something. Turtles? Lance thought it was turtles.

"Hey, guys!" he said, suddenly realizing he hadn't brought his water bottle and had no reason to actually be over there. "Matt, what's up? Haven't seen you around yet."

Matt already looked like the definition of a camp counselor: cargo shorts, camp T-shirt from four years ago, hiking sandals, backpack, all of it. He was just missing a half-dozen friendship bracelets. "Hey, Lance," he said, "aren't you supposed to be at lifeguard training?"

"Bro, I know how to sit by a pool and yell at kids," Lance said, and Shiro laughed, even though he shouldn't have found that funny, what with being the assistant director and all. Like Lance cared. He had a pretty laugh.

"What's going on, Lance?" Shiro asked, and Lance hadn't thought far enough, so he didn't have a made-up reason to be talking to Shiro yet.

He just said the first thing that came to mind, which was, "hey, are we doing a bonfire tonight?"

Shiro just shrugged. "I don't see why not," he said.

"Sweet, yeah, I just thought..." what had he just thought? He'd just thought about how pretty Shiro's eyes were. "I just thought it'd be nice for all the new people to get to meet the rest of the staff, y'know, since we're all in groups most of the day."

Shiro's face split into a beaming grin, because this was exactly the kind of thing he'd want somebody under his leadership to suggest. "Yeah, that sounds great. Thanks for the idea, Lance, that's really considerate of you."

"Yeah. Well. I just, uh." Yup, here was the part where he'd run out of things to say. "I should go. Allura's gonna kick my ass if I'm super late."

Shiro gave him a look that said both *don't anger Allura* and *you better get that language under control before children show up*. Lance gave him a jaunty little fake salute as he headed toward the pool, breaking into a run as soon as he was out of the lodge, because Allura would make him clean the pool bathrooms if he was late.

He was perfectly on time, but Allura made him clean the pool bathrooms anyway, for no damn reason. Or, maybe because he kept splashing her in the face during her pool safety lecture.

Yeah, it was probably that.

In addition to the bathrooms, they cleaned out the pool shed (which had become home to an angry gopher during the off-season) and the lake's equipment shed. Also, the garage where they kept everything for the water-skiing excursions. And the vans, which they used to drive the kids to Lake Altea for water-skiing.

Lance had worn his swim trunks, because he figured they were at least gonna do *some* lifeguarding, but he spent zero percent of his time in the water and about sixty percent of it chasing a gopher. By dinner, he was disgusting and sweaty, his hair a mess because he actually had, at one point, dunked his head in the lake.

So, he had the added benefit of smelling like lake water.

He managed to avoid Shiro during dinner, because Lance did *not* want anybody attractive seeing (or smelling) him right now, but it meant he sat next to Keith. Oh well, at least Keith was the kind of attractive person who would hate him no matter what. Oh, and they had Pidge, but Pidge wouldn't care what he he looked like.

Keith wrinkled his nose as soon as Lance sat down. "You look like shit," he said. Keith was wearing those stupid fingerless climbing gloves he was practically attached to and his hair was up in a ponytail already.

"Yeah, well, you try chasing a gopher out of the pool shed. What'd you cool ropes people do all day?" Lance asked, around bites of sandwich. It was one of those giant subs that was cut up into sections, and Lance had three of those sections lined up on his plate.

"Do you chew your food, or just inhale it?" Pidge asked. "Asking for scientific reasons."

"Just did inventory," Keith said, abrupt because he was also inhaling his food.

Lance was at least satisfied that everyone else's day had been just as boring as his. "Lame," he said, spitting out crumbs directly onto Pidge's plate. Pidge got up and left the two of them to find less disgusting dinner buddies, taking care to whack Lance on the back of the head with the plate on the way.

"Little shit," Lance mumbled, both because Pidge was, definitively, a little shit, and because Pidge was just as gross as the rest of them, so they couldn't complain.

After a few minutes, Hunk plopped down into Pidge's empty seat and tore open a bag of Doritos. Shit, how did he manage to get all the good chips? Probably because Sal liked him. Hunk was smart, getting in good with the kitchen staff.

"Hey, Lance, surprised to see you over here," he said, leaning over the table to fist-bump Keith.

Lance said, "what do you mean?" but it was barely intelligible because he said it while actively taking a bite of food. Hunk still got it.

"I'm just saying, I'm surprised you're not over there flirting with Shiro."

Lance actually swallowed before speaking again. "Dude, as Keith has helpfully pointed out, I look like shit. I'm not gonna go talk to Shiro while I look like shit."

Keith was frowning, probably because Lance was calling him out for being an asshole. "I thought Shiro was dating somebody," he said, before going back to annihilating his food.

"Lies and slander," Lance said, along with, "yeah he's *gonna* be dating *me*," and other things that made Keith roll his eyes so hard it looked like it hurt. Well. They'd see who would be rolling their eyes when some adorable shit started happening during a campfire.

Lance was an expert at this. He knew how to be adorable during a campfire.

By the grace of campground gods, Lance managed to get a shower before they started up the campfire, so he no longer looked and smelled like something they scraped off the underside of one of the bunkbeds. By the time he met back up with the rest of the group, consisting mostly of veteran counselors and a couple newbies who felt comfortable hanging with everyone, they already had a roaring fire going and a spread of marshmallows, chocolate, and graham crackers laid out.

Lance saw Shiro right away, he was hard to miss, hanging at the back of the group like that. The fire pit was just behind the building Shiro and the rest

of the leadership team lived, so maybe he'd just come from his room? Whatever he was doing, he was standing alone, a good ten feet from any other people, and it meant Lance had him all to himself.

"Hey, Shiro!" he called, picking his way across the grass to reach him, because Lance thought paths were for people who didn't want to get places as fast as possible by taking the direct route. "What's up?"

Shiro glanced up at him and smiled, looking especially gorgeous backlit by the fire. "Hey, Lance. Just waiting on—oh, hey." He turned his attention to Matt, who was taking the steps out of the back door of the Leadership building all in one. Matt definitely didn't live there, so Lance wasn't exactly sure what he was doing, but he was between them in seconds, throwing an arm around Shiro's shoulders and steering him toward the campfire.

"Yes, hello, s'mores!" Matt cheered, "dude, I'm so good at s'mores. Lemme make you one."

Lance wasn't exactly sure if Matt had seen him. Shiro gave him a little half-wave as he was dragged fireside, and once they had their backs to him, he realized the back of the hoodie Matt was wearing said "Shirogane." Oh. Huh.

Lance jogged around to the other side of the campfire and took a seat next to Pidge, who was sitting on top of the picnic table full of s'mores supplies, eating marshmallows plain, right out of the bag. "You know what we should put on s'mores?" Pidge said, as soon as he approached. "Peanut butter. Lance. Let's get Hunk, I'm sure he knows where the keys to the kitchen are."

"Yeah, yeah, later," he said, waving away any peanut-butter-related suggestions. "Hey, weird question, totally not based on any feelings I have for anybody, but is your brother dating Shiro?"

Pidge hopped off the picnic table. "Yeah, dude. For like, three years. Keep up."

"Oh," Lance said. He was either staring pensively into the fire or distracted by it. Even he couldn't tell. "Well, good for them, I guess."

"If this is about your massive crush on Shiro, sorry, man. Come find peanut butter with me. It'll make you feel better."

"You knew about that?" Lance shrieked, because nobody would be able to hear them over the party and because if somebody did, Lance yelling nonsense was normal anyway. "Why didn't you say something? No. No, I'm not finding peanut butter with you, do that yourself, you little traitor."

Pidge shrugged and snagged another marshmallow before heading off in a direction that suggested the lodge kitchen, and Lance went back to staring at the fire. He wondered if it was bad for your eyes.

He heard somebody approach, but assumed it was for marshmallows or something. Didn't expect them to kick him in the ankle. Didn't expect it to be Keith, either. "Hey," Keith said, monosyllabic as always.

"Can I *help* you?" Lance said, in a voice that made it clear he didn't want to help Keith with anything.

Keith sighed, like Lance was exasperating him beyond belief, which was unfair, because Lance didn't even have his whistle on his person. "I mean, I was going to ask if you were okay, because you looked... uh. Something. Dunno if I want the answer, though."

"It's cold," Lance explained. Then, because he couldn't keep his mouth shut, "ugh. Usual camp drama. Found out the person I was into is dating somebody else. That kind of bullshit."

Keith hummed, like he was trying to be sympathetic but had never actually had a romantic feeling toward another person, and therefore had trouble relating. At least, that was how Lance was interpreting it.

"Is that the answer you didn't want?" Lance asked, and Keith made another noise, this time a definite affirmative. Both of them stared at the fire a little bit longer.

"Do you want my hoodie?"

"What?" All Lance could think about was Matt in Shiro's hoodie, arm around him.

"Like, to borrow. Do you wanna wear it? You said you were cold." Keith was still looking at the fire, not at him.

"Oh. Naw, dude, I don't wanna steal it."

"It's cool," Keith said, "I've got a flannel, too." Oh. He did, tied around his waist in a way that was either hipster or practical, just like his ponytail. There was no telling with Keith.

"Then, yeah. Alright," Lance said, and Keith unzipped his hoodie and handed it to him. It was plain black, like half the clothing Keith wore, and it was warm, because Keith had just been wearing it. "Thanks, man," he said, watching Keith pull on his flannel—red and black, because of course it was. "You ready to go burn some marshmallows?"

Keith stared at him aghast, his eyebrows creased in the center. "You don't *burn* them, Lance," he said, and then proceeded to say the most words Lance had ever heard him get out in a ten-minute period, telling him that his marshmallow technique was *barbaric* and *absurd*.

Lance shoved his hands in the pockets of Keith's hoodie as he fully appreciated the s'mores tirade, and his fingers bumped against something small and metal. He curled his hand around the familiar shape of...

His whistle.

That asshole was trying to steal it.

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When Keith got his hoodie back from Lance, it smelled like his shampoo.

He knew it smelled like that because Lance's hair had been wet from his shower, but it still felt like he was purposefully trying to make Keith's

clothes smell like fucking... mango and coconut, or whatever. The scent wasn't too terrible, but Keith didn't want to smell like a fruit salad all day.

Lance also returned it without the whistle in the pocket, because Keith was an idiot who forgot he'd tried to steal his roommate's property. He announced its return to its rightful owner the next morning when he blew it in Keith's face until Keith threatened to shove it down Lance's throat.

The rest of training week went by without incident, because Lance was truly afraid enough of Morning Keith to stop trying to disturb him. Keith had always liked training week, because he just hung out with the other people on his team and did the ropes courses a bunch of times. It was always in the name of equipment testing, but it was really just fun.

He did, however, forget about the whole sunscreen thing on Thursday, when they did the climbing wall, which was in the middle of an open field. Needless to say, after two hours of sitting on top of the wall transferring people to the other clip so they could zipline down, his shoulders were burnt to hell. It happened every year, once or twice until he got a decent tan or started remembering to bring something with an SPF in it.

He showed up to lunch late because he'd taken a trip to the nurse's office to grab a thing of aloe lotion, and when he sat down at the table, dropping into his chair with a squeak that was the chair's fault and not his, Lance whistled. With his mouth, this time.

"Impressive," he said, gesturing at Keith, "this is like, a Pidge-level sunburn."

"I don't get sunburned, not after last year," Pidge said, "I just stay in the shade and haunt people."

All of them winced, because Pidge had gotten actual sun poisoning last year, Lance seeming particularly chagrined for bringing it up. "Anyway," he said, dragging out the word, "you forget sunscreen is a thing?"

"Didn't remember we were doing the wall today," Keith said, reaching up to touch his nose, which was bright pink.

"Sorry, bud," Hunk said, genuinely sympathetic. "You doing more of that this afternoon?"

"No, thank god."

"Good," Lance said, "'cuz half this table doesn't even use sunscreen, so we can't help you out. I've just been working on my tan all day. I swear I go like eight shades darker in the summer." He stuck out his arm, which looked basically the same. Not that Keith spent a lot of time thinking about Lance's skin tone. Even if he did always have really even skin. Keith chalked that up to all the moisturizers Lance used. Maybe he should get some. Maybe Lance knew something he didn't.

Well, it wasn't like moisturizers were gonna help his sunburn.

During training week, everybody's breaks were at the same time, which was nice, because it was hard trying to line up breaks to spend time with your friends once camp actually started. They all had the evenings free, because no campers, and they had the half hour after lunch, when they'd normally have an all-camp meeting and announce the scores for cabin competitions or whatever. Keith was never at those, because he used that time to get the ropes course set up for the afternoon session.

Keith decided he was going to head to the lake to swim, because it was shaded, and would probably feel nice on his burnt skin. On his way out of the lodge, though, he almost tripped over Lance, who was laying on the back deck.

Lance was on a beach towel, on his front, arms folded under his head, possibly asleep, except that he peeled an eye open when the door banged shut behind Keith.

"What are you doing," Keith said, "I mean, other than being a fire hazard."

"Sunbathing?" Lance said, like it should have been obvious. If Keith thought about it, it should've been. Lance was shirtless, and wearing those stupid short running shorts that fashion should've left behind in the 70s.

"Oh," Keith said, because he couldn't think of anything else. He was busy coming to the realization that Lance kind of had great muscle tone. Keith appreciated that, in the way a guy who worked out a lot appreciated that kind of thing. Also, in the way a guy who was attracted to other guys appreciated that kind of thing. "Why the hell are you doing that right in front of the door?"

"I'm not right in front of the door, you just weren't watching where you were going," Lance said, his voice muffled because he buried his face in his arms. "What are you doing?"

"Gonna go swim."

"Need a lifeguard?" Lance asked, pushing himself up so he could grin at Keith.

Keith frowned. God, why were Lance's legs so long? Who decided that was okay? "I changed my mind. I'm not going swimming. I'm gonna go take a nap and dream about not having to work with you."

"That's a good idea," Lance said, "the nap thing. We're doing a staff night hike tonight, you should get some rest."

"I hate night hikes," Keith grumbled.

"Yeah, and fun, I know."

"Somebody always rolls their ankle."

"Go get some sleep, Keith," Lance said, like he was telling a preschooler it was naptime. "I promise, I'll still be beautiful when you get back."

Wait. Had he... noticed? Keith hadn't been staring. He'd been looking a normal amount, because you look at a person when you're having a conversation, even if they're laying on the ground almost-naked in front of you. No, Keith decided. Lance was just self-absorbed. That must've been it.

"Fine," Keith said, and he was down the stairs and headed towards his room before Lance turned over. Probably a good thing.

The nap didn't really help, just made him more tired and bleary for the afternoon. They'd moved on to the indoor ropes course, though, which he could probably do blindfolded. He'd have to try that sometime.

After dinner, Keith was using his phone as a mirror to put more aloe on his face, while everybody got ready for the night hike. He frowned at himself in his phone camera as he tried to squeeze out more of the green gel with one hand. It wasn't working out so well for him. Also, his phone camera was kind of shitty, so it didn't work too well as a mirror.

"You're not doing that so good," said someone, and when Keith looked up, it was Lance. Of course it was Lance.

"Yeah, well, I'm not using the bathroom mirror," he said, continuing to fight with the bottle of aloe he'd commandeered from the nurse's office. There were a bunch of girls in both the men's and women's restrooms doing some lowkey racist face paint, and Keith wasn't risking somebody trying to put a bunch of turquoise triangles all over his face. It'd probably irritate his skin, too.

Lance sat down on the stage across from him, rolling up the sleeves of his flannel until they rested at his elbows. "Okay, well at least let me help. You look pitiful," he said, reaching for the bottle of aloe. Keith set his phone down.

"What?"

"C'mere, get your face over here," Lance said, reaching for him and then retracting his hand when he realized it might not have been the best idea to lay it on Keith's burnt shoulder. "Just let me put the stuff on your face, dude."

He laid his hands on Keith's face, rubbing in a glob of aloe Keith hadn't been able to see in his phone camera. Then, Lance grabbed the bottle and did a better job than Keith would've done on his own face even with a decent mirror. He even remembered Keith's ears, carefully tucking his hair out of the way first.

It was kind of... nice. Keith had to close his eyes, because he couldn't handle watching Lance focus all of his attention on him. He started to relax under the feeling of cool fingers toning down the aching heat of his skin, but all of him tensed up when Lance said, "you want me to get your back?"

"Oh, uh. I don't really..." Keith said, pulling at the hoodie he was wearing demonstratively. Underneath it, he had on a T-shirt that covered the majority of the burns.

"Dude, you can take your shirt off, I'm pretty sure the 'make sure you're always fully clothed unless you're at the pool' rule doesn't fall into action until a bunch of kids get here," Lance said.

True. There was nobody around to be a good role model for, and the sunburn on Keith's back was so bad it was starting to itch. He hopped off the stage and unzipped his hoodie, leaving it hanging over the edge. He pulled his T-shirt off, careful not to drag it through the aloe that was still drying on his cheeks and nose.

He heard Lance inhale through his teeth behind him, and for a stupid, *stupid* moment, Keith thought maybe it was because of the muscle definition on his back. Thankfully, Lance said, "Jesus, you're like a fuckin' lobster," instead of anything complimentary. "You have like, sunburn lines instead of tan lines," he said, fingertips gently tracing the racerback shape of the tank top Keith had been wearing earlier. It made him shiver.

"Would you hurry up?" Keith said, not wanting to stand around the lodge shirtless any longer than he had to.

"Yeah, yeah," Lance said, thumping around as he readjusted himself, sitting directly behind Keith, his legs dangling off the sides of the stage on either side of him, framing his hips. If Lance moved about a foot closer, he'd have his chest pressed against Keith's back, which sounded unpleasant.

Maybe when he wasn't sunburned, it'd feel nice, though.

Lance's fingers on his skin were even more of a relief here, because Keith hadn't been able to treat most of his back. Even the places he could

normally reach were a pain, because stretching his shoulders too much just pulled at his burnt skin. He sighed, quietly enough that Lance couldn't hear him. Lance squeezed his shoulders when he went over them, gentle enough that it didn't hurt, but it pushed some tension out of him.

Okay. Keith could admit to himself that Lance was pretty attractive. And he could maybe come close to admitting to himself that he had a little bit of a crush. He was absolutely sure that was part of why he hated Lance so much, because if a guy was *that obnoxious*, there was no way Keith should've been able to be into him. But when Lance was quietly humming and carefully making sure he treated every part of Keith's burned skin, it was hard to find him annoying at all.

It was a dangerous place to be.

When Lance patted him on the arm and said, "alright, you're done," Keith realized he'd closed his eyes again. He wasn't sure why.

"Thanks," he muttered, giving the gel another thirty seconds to dry before pulling his shirt back on.

"No problem," Lance said, "let me know if it's still bad tomorrow."

It took Keith a second to realize that Lance was offering to do this *again*, but once he did, he was glad his face was already so red, nobody would know he was blushing a little bit. "Yeah, I, uh," he started, and then, miracle of all miracles, Shiro walked in and started talking about what hiking trail they were taking, saving him from saying anything dumb.

Keith wasn't sure why he decided to go on this hike. Even with his flashlight, he could hardly see the people in front of him, and, in Keith's opinion, the whole point of hiking was being able to see cool stuff while you exercise.

They did hear an owl at one point, and they also heard Matt and Pidge both freaking out about the owl. Keith would bet money those two went birdwatching as a family activity.

Halfway down the trail, somebody ran straight into him, colliding hard with one of his burned shoulders. "Ow," he said, turning to shine his flashlight at whoever was running into people in the dark, and catching a squinting Lance in the beam, closer than Keith thought he was.

"Dude! Cut it out," Lance said, and Keith dropped his flashlight beam to their sneakers. "C'mere." He put an arm around Keith, grabbing his waist, probably because of the sunburn, but honestly, Keith would rather have dealt with the pain. Lance was pulling Keith against him, their sides flush, Keith's arm automatically going around his back.

"What the fuck are you doing," Keith asked, because he was pretty sure it wasn't normal to go around hugging somebody in the dark without explanation.

"I can't see," Lance said, his head close enough that he was breathing directly into Keith's ear. It made him shiver, even though he was getting hotter. It should have been disgusting. Operative word being 'should'. "My phone battery died and I don't have a regular flashlight, so."

"Why don't you have a regular flashlight?" Keith was whispering, but he wasn't sure why. Maybe because it was dark and because Lance was also whispering.

"I didn't have time to like, go looking for one." Lance's fingers squeezed a little on his side. Keith had trouble keeping himself from turning so Lance could put both arms around him. They started walking, slowly, because Lance was still clinging to him, and they were at the back of the group, still a few yards away from catching up with everybody.

"Go looking for one? Like, in our room?"

Lance shook his head, and his mouth brushed against Keith's ear. Keith didn't know why he was still leaning so close, they could have been doing this at a distance. He tripped over a tree root because he hadn't been able to pay attention to the trail with Lance's mouth was on him. Lance had to hold him closer to steady him. Keith thought he might possibly be in hell. "No, like, I don't have one, dude."

Keith shoved him in the shoulder a little bit, and it put enough space between them that he wouldn't be able to feel every word Lance said anymore. "Why don't you have one?" He was still whispering, but it was more like whisper-shouting now.

"I dunno, I just don't. I've got my phone. Why? Do most people?"

Keith shook his head, glad Lance couldn't see the smile pulling at the corners of his mouth. "Lance, I guarantee you, every person on staff at this camp has a flashlight, a pocket knife, a water bottle, a first aid kit, and, if they're not me, sunscreen. Like, in their backpack. Right now."

"I normally work in the daytime," Lance protested, "I just have a pair of sunglasses and bug spray for the lake in there."

"You're a dumbass," Keith said, and now he was sure Lance could *hear* his smile. He patted Lance on the shoulder. "It's alright. I won't tell anybody." Because then he'd have to tell them how he and Lance spent the latter half of the hike with their arms around each other. "God, what is even the point of these things?"

He felt Lance shrug against his back. "Camaraderie? Building friendships? Bird noises? Completing the first step in getting yourself a camp boyfriend?" He said something along the lines of, "or girlfriend," but Keith was busy both recoiling and having heart palpitations.

Yes, his brain told him, but he said, "no. What are you even talking about. That's so dumb."

"No, dude. It's a real thing. All camp relationships go like this: you do some kind of camp activity together. Night hike, pool chicken, get in canoes and splash each other with lake water, whatever. Then, you have a romantic hang-out at the gazebo. After that, you go on a date to the shitty Dairy Queen—"

"You say that like there's a good Dairy Queen in this town."

"Shut up. You go on a date to the shitty Dairy Queen, and then you drive out to Lake Altea at sunset and make out. Then, you either break up by the end of the summer or someone proposes out front of the lodge. That's literally how every relationship I've seen goes," Lance said. And then, probably because he could feel how tense Keith still was, "don't worry, I'm here for the bird noises."

"Thank fuck."

Lance didn't talk to him much for the rest of the hike, and Keith didn't mind, because he was invested in making sure he didn't trip over any more tree roots. Actually, Lance said almost nothing until after they'd made it back to the lodge. They were in the little room off to the side of the kitchen where they had a machine that dispensed bad espresso drinks, a coffeepot, and a bunch of kinds of tea. It was counselors-only and it was the best room in the lodge.

Lance whistled the tune to a song Keith didn't know while he examined the options, which had not changed since last year. Keith grabbed an insulated cup and made himself a green tea, and Lance, who'd just finished making himself a hot chocolate, laughed.

"What?"

Lance reached toward him and he only flinched a little bit, but it was enough that Lance stopped mid-reach. "You've got a leaf in your hair," he explained, before plucking it out and presenting it to him.

It was tiny and dry, and crackled satisfyingly when Keith snapped it in half before dropping it in the trash. "You have *got* to stop touching my hair all the time."

— — —

The official start of camp went well. Shiro and Coran had this thing down to a science after four years of working together, and it made parent drop-off as painless as possible. Lance spent the arrival period in the parking lot, directing people to available spots and then to the lodge and, depending on

what cabin their camper had been assigned to, where their luggage was supposed to go. He also pet three dogs, so it was a really good start to the summer.

As always, the first week went by *fast*, because the newbies weren't used to the schedule or the operations yet, and Lance and the other veterans who knew how stuff actually worked were in high demand. Lance felt like he didn't see anybody but the other lifeguards, the people who drove the speedboats, and the cat all week.

(The cat, who, by verdict of being a barn cat, was called Barn Cat, particularly liked Lance and would wait outside the fence surrounding the pool for Lance to pet him on most days.)

He did see Hunk whenever his campers had pool time and he took a break from doing cannonballs to hang out by the lifeguard stand and talk to Lance. He also sat with Hunk and Matt's cabin during lunch and dinner instead of with the other specialists, because hey, whatever time you get to spend with your best friend is a good time, right? Plus, Matt was pretty great, because he was like a bigger Pidge who wouldn't blackmail you. Probably.

He hardly saw Keith, only for the hour or so before bed when they chilled in their room before passing out. Neither of them talked to each other then, because Keith was tired of people by that point, and Lance was just tired. He told himself it was a good thing, because Keith seemed to freaking hate him, but this summer, Keith hated him a little less, and he might've actually been fun to hang out with.

On Thursday, he walked from the pool into the gym to refill his water bottle at the drinking fountain, and he found Keith doing the indoor ropes course blindfolded.

He wandered over, turned to the girl who was belaying him, and said, "what does he think he's doing?"

"He said he could do it blindfolded," she explained, which was pretty obvious. "I mean, we do the outdoor ones blindfolded all the time, so."

Lance watched Keith haul himself up another rung on the Jacob's ladder, which was basically a series of wooden beams held up by metal cables like a giant ladder, each one further away from the one before. Eventually, they got too far apart to grab the next one up, so typically, it was a two-person activity, with one climber boosting the other one up. This was all theoretical for Lance, because he didn't do any of the climbing courses, because heights were not his thing.

Keith was doing fine by himself. His strategy mostly involved grabbing the next rung up and then curling his lower body up so he could get a leg around. God, he must have had crazy core strength to do that. Lance knew he had a six-pack, but he hardly ever saw Keith in action. His arms were insanely defined, too, and he was strong enough to hold himself up for way longer than Lance ever could.

Also, the climbing harness made his ass look way too good. Those things were supposed to look awkward and uncomfortable, not... yeah, that.

Lance remembered somebody had been talking to him. "Wait, you do the one where you climb up a telephone pole and then jump off it *blindfolded*?" he asked, realizing he'd taken way too long a thirst pause.

"Yup. You can't ever grab the trapeze bar with a blindfold on, though, so you usually just end up hanging around blindfolded until they let you down."

"How long does that take?"

"Depends."

"You guys are kind of mean to each other," Lance said, a bit absent because he was trying to remember if he'd ever thought about how those climbing harnesses just like. *Really* frame your junk. And then trying to desperately not think about Keith's junk.

Keith was almost at the top, but the last rung was outside of his arm-span. He'd have to jump to reach it, but with a blindfold on... yeah, it didn't work.

He fell backward, dangling in midair until she let him down, and then he yanked the blindfold off. "Shit! I almost had that—oh. Lance?"

"Yeah, I did witness that fail," Lance said. Keith had those climbing gloves on again. Lance wondered how much palm-sweat those things absorbed. Gross. "Hey, can you do the climbing wall blindfolded?"

"Only the easy side," Keith said, undoing his harness with practiced movements.

"Oh. Well, don't talk to me 'til you can do it on the hard side."

Lance dragged Hunk into the back office during lunch under the guise of checking their mailboxes. He couldn't close the door in the middle of the day, but he nudged it shut as much as he could without looking like he was doing it on purpose.

As soon as they were far enough away from anyone who might've cared to listen in on Lance's drama, he said, "Hunk. I think Keith might be hot."

Hunk actually did check his mailbox. "I'm pretty sure most of the girls on staff have already figured that out," he said. His mailbox was empty, and he frowned.

"Okay, I think I might think Keith is hot."

Hunk leveled him with a confused look and a, "run that one by me again?"

"I just stared at Keith's butt a lot."

According to the expression on Hunk's face, that explained nothing.

"I think I have like, a thing," Lance said, and then glanced over his shoulder to make sure nobody was watching, "for Keith."

"Oh," Hunk said, "glad you figured that out, buddy." He clapped Lance on the shoulder and then headed in the direction of his campers.

"Wait! You're not gonna like, help me out with this?" Lance screeched, chasing after him and stopping him at the door.

"I... don't know how I would," Hunk said. "It's not like I've ever, you know, dated a dude or anything."

"Yeah, but you were his roommate for two summers!"

Hunk paused and thought for a second. "Yeah. Yeah, but I don't think Keith's ever dated anybody either. I mean, it's not like we talked about that kinda stuff."

"Fine, fine," Lance conceded. "Also, if Keith asks, I didn't stare at him at all."

"It's not like I'm gonna tell him! Please don't make this weird, Lance," Hunk said, rubbing his temple. "It's only week one, please don't make it weird."

"I'm not gonna make it weird."

That night, he made it weird.

Camp Arus had one game that, in all honesty, was a little bit dangerous, always got somebody mildly injured, and was only worth it because it was really, *really* fun.

Every week, on Thursday night, all of the counselors woke their campers up at midnight to play what they called "Mission: Impossible," because they had no respect for copyrighted materials and because it was really fun to blast the theme music over the camp-wide loudspeaker system that was *technically* supposed to be for emergency purposes. Each cabin received a dossier with a list of items they had to find and checkpoints they had to pass through in order to complete their mission, and whoever finished the mission first was declared the winner.

It was basically an elaborate nighttime scavenger hunt, but everyone got way too into it. Lance always dressed as a security guard to catch the "spies" and detain them for a while until they could either explain their way

out of it or be given a time penalty. It was fun chasing them down, usually with Hunk following behind with a giant Maglite propped up on his shoulder like an actual security guard, but this year, he didn't get that lucky.

Lance got assigned to man one of the checkpoints, which meant he sat around at the gazebo with a bunch of eye-burning LED lanterns placed around the edge, doing pretty much nothing until a group of campers came by and he either signed off on their mission report because they brought him the appropriate scavenger hunt items, or signed off on their mission report even though they didn't have their stuff, because they bribed him.

Lance was not above bribery. Especially if he was being bribed with candy.

It would have been a boring, regular night, but it turned into a test of Lance's ability to keep his mouth shut and an overall anxiety-fest when he was paired up with Keith.

Don't tell him you stared at his ass.

Oh, and extra don't tell him you stared at his crotch, too.

Keith was wearing that black hoodie again, the one he'd let Lance borrow at the campfire, this time without Lance's whistle hidden in the pocket. Probably. Lance wondered if Keith ever wore anything that wasn't black, red, or gray, and how he didn't constantly overheat because of it.

And now he was staring at Keith again.

"I did the hard side of the climbing wall blindfolded today," Keith said.

"Oh! I wasn't serious about like, not talking to me," Lance said. "But that's cool. How did it go?"

Keith's face looked very pretty in the red light from the lanterns, and Lance appreciated them for a moment, even though they still made his eyes burn if he looked at them directly. "I got to the part where it inclines and tore the blindfold off. But, yeah, we had like ten minutes left in the session and the campers wanted to see me do it, so."

"Huh. Showoff." He bumped Keith's foot with his and Keith kicked him back.

"Just because you can't do all your cool dives when there are kids around."

Lance wasn't aware he had any cool dives, but apparently Keith thought he did, so he must have.

"So, do you like... *do* rock-climbing? Like, outside of camp."

Keith looked like he was about to ask Lance if he went swimming outside of camp, but he just answered, "yeah. And like, backpacking and shit. Me and Shiro used to go all the time." He frowned, then, and some gears clicked into place in Lance's head right around the 'used to'.

"Wait, was there, uh. Was there a thing? With you guys?" He sat forward, knees propped up on the bench, arms around them.

"What do you mean?" Keith asked, his eyes narrowed.

"Like, did you date him?"

"What? No! He just went to grad school out of state, you weirdass," Keith said, kicking Lance's foot again. "Why would you even assume that?"

"I dunno. He's hot, you're hot, he's gay, you're... I don't actually know." Was Keith gay? Was Lance assuming things based on his hair and the way he wore skinny jeans in the summer and the fact that he was so gorgeous, Lance *wanted* him to be into dudes—okay, no. He was stopping that train of thought before it got any further away from the station.

"Did you just say I'm hot?"

Shit. Fuck. That was exactly what he said.

"I just mean, objectively, uh."

That was about when their last cabin rolled up, saving Lance from whatever the end of that sentence was going to be. Good, he could get out of there,

head to the lodge to get some hot chocolate, and pretend like he hadn't said anything about Keith's appearance. Unless, maybe, Keith wanted to talk about it when he got back to their room. Shit. Why did he think it was a good idea to room with Keith, again? Something about temperature and being furthest from the bathroom.

Well, fuck that.

Keith, thank god, didn't seem to want to talk about anything Lance had said or was going to say.

In fact, Keith was laying on his bed with his headphones in when Lance got back, texting somebody, from the looks of things. He must have been fresh from the shower, a towel laid overtop of his pillow to keep his wet hair from soaking into it, wearing his boxers and an old camp t-shirt that he'd cut the sleeves and most of the sides off of. He had tan lines where the end of his shorts usually fell and Lance, who was usually all about even skin tone, somehow found it cute, so he knew he was completely screwed.

— — —

Keith and Shiro usually stayed at camp on the weekends, unless Shiro went home with Matt, because Keith's dorm was closed during the summer and Shiro lived too far away. Nobody else was more than an hour away, so nobody else stayed behind with them. It was quiet on the weekends, and Keith just about had the whole camp to himself. It was also super easy for Shiro to catch him anxiety-running around the entire damn campground.

"That's the third time you've gone running today, isn't it?" Shiro asked.

Nope. It was the fourth.

"Yeah, well, I have to, uh, I mean, I keep just making ramen on the weekends, so. Working that off," he said, walking back and forth across the sidewalk in front of the lodge.

"Right. So you're not doing that thing where you work out and turn the music up really loud so you don't think about anything."

"Shiro, cut it out," Keith said, "I'm fine."

Mostly fine. He might've been overthinking the part where Lance had said he was hot, and then he'd hardcore backpedaled. Keith wasn't sure what to make of that. He had two ideas: either Lance actually did find him attractive but didn't want Keith to know that, or Lance thought he was just sort of good-looking, but wasn't really attracted to him. Maybe if Keith had been a more perceptive person, he would've been able to figure out which it was, but Lance was, as always, a mystery to him.

"Sure," Shiro said, but he didn't look like he believed it. "You should try to figure out whatever it is before next week starts. It's supposed to be in the nineties every day, and I don't want you dehydrating yourself doing your... stress running, or whatever."

"I'll be fine," Keith said.

He was not fine, and during the next couple of days, Keith discovered that ninety-degree weather was hell to go running in. It was also hell to do anything else in, so the campers were, on the whole, miserable unless they were in the air-conditioned lodge or a body of water. The counselors started incorporating water balloons into a lot more games, because for some reason, they thought being wet in hot weather was preferable. Keith thought it was just your own personal bubble of humidity.

The climbing wall and the direct sunlight that came with it was awful, the indoor course in the gym had no air conditioning, and Keith's only relief came in the form of the outdoor ropes course, which was in the woods, and, therefore, shaded. Plus, they hauled one of those industrial-sized water coolers out there every morning and had it up on a tree stump high enough that Keith could dunk his head under it, which was good for about five minutes, until he remembered the humidity thing.

Keith's hair was still wet when he trudged back up to the gym to spend an hour stuck at the mercy of the enormous box-fans they had set up in there. The pool was crowded, because everyone wanted to spend as much time in it as possible, and Keith got a limp half-salute from Lance as he walked past.

"Hey," he said, leaning his arms on top of the chain-link fence surrounding the pool. It was just short enough for him to do that if he stood on his tiptoes. It was also about a billion degrees. Keith kept doing it, because he thought he looked cool. "How's direct sunlight treating you?"

Lance, who was seated a half-dozen feet away from Keith, didn't look up, because he was supposed to be watching the pool. "I'm melting into the lifeguard stand," Lance said, "if I look like I just jumped in the pool, I didn't. I'm just that sweaty. Also, I think my water bottle is actually boiling."

"I thought you liked hot weather."

"I like the *beach*," Lance said, and then paused to blow his whistle at somebody who was running on the pool deck. "I do not enjoy this... hell. It's hell, right?"

"Probably," Keith said. He glanced at his watch. Still ten minutes until he had to be at the indoor ropes course. "Hey, you want me to get you some ice water?"

Lance craned around the back of the lifeguard stand to look at him and flipped his sunglasses up onto his head. "Wait, are you serious?"

"Yeah, throw me your water bottle," Keith said, "I was going by the lodge to refill mine, anyway." That was a lie. He'd refilled his at the cooler like five minutes ago.

"Yes, absolutely, please do that." Lance unscrewed the lid of his water bottle and upended it, dumping the overheated water onto the concrete of the pool deck. He threw it at Keith, who caught it with one hand and was very pleased with himself for doing so.

"Cool. I'll be back in five," Keith said, turning around and heading for the lodge, glancing down at the stickers on Lance's water bottle while he did. There were a bunch from stuff he didn't recognize, mostly cool, artsy things, alongside the world's most stereotypical "I heart N.Y." sticker. Probably what he should have expected from Lance.

Keith told himself he was doing this because it meant he got to spend a few precious minutes in the lodge's air conditioning, which felt extra nice on his wet hair. He certainly wasn't doing it because he wanted Lance to like him.

That would be ridiculous.

When Keith returned, he actually walked in the gate to the pool and around to Lance, because he didn't think it was very polite to launch a full bottle of water and mostly ice at somebody. Lance didn't notice him until he pressed the bottle against his knee, the freezing cold making him jump.

"Agh! Oh! Keith, hey," he said, reaching down so Keith could hand over his water bottle. He immediately opened it, drank enough that there was now just a giant chunk of ice sitting in it, and said, "oh my god. Thank you. I love you, man."

Keith's face was going red, but he wasn't sunburned this time. He was just mentally replaying the phrase "I love you" in Lance's voice over and over until he completely lost his mind. It didn't take long for that to happen.

"It's, uh, it's nothing," he said. "I mean, I had to go over there anyway, so."

"Naw dude, you're a lifesaver. I've gotta get you back for this one," he said, fiddling with the little plastic bit that kept the lid of his water bottle attached. He had nice hands. He played guitar, there was an acoustic in a huge case that also had a ton of stickers sitting in the corner of their bedroom. Keith hadn't ever heard him play it, but he also didn't go to a lot of campfires. He wondered if Lance could sing for real, like, not camp songs.

And, Lance had said something to him. And he hadn't listened to it at all. "Sorry, what?"

"I said, we should hang out when we're free tonight," Lance said. "I'll pay you back for saving me from dehydration, yeah?"

Keith wasn't sure how he planned on doing that, but he didn't find it in him to ask. He just said, "yeah, sure," and then was two minutes late to the

indoor ropes course.

When Keith met Lance in the parking lot that evening, it was still ridiculously hot, the air only cooling down a little as the sun set. Keith had changed into a shirt that didn't have a patch of sweat between his shoulderblades, and since he was off-duty and nobody cared what he was wearing, it was one of the old ones he'd cut the sides off of. Better ventilation. Also, he looked good in it. Lance was wearing another in his series of neon-colored tank tops, all of which were awful, but looked pretty alright against his dark skin.

"So, where are we going?" Keith asked, his shoes crunching on the gravel, hand stuffed in the pockets of his joggers, one clenched around his phone, the other around his keys.

"Nice hair," Lance said, and Keith pulled a hand out of his pocket to pat the back of his head, remembering that one of the girls had given him a French braid that afternoon.

"Shit, I forgot about that."

"No, it works. Probably keeps it out of your face, too," Lance said. "Also, we're going to the shitty Dairy Queen, because I want ice cream, and Hunk won't tell me the combination to the lock on the ice cream freezer." He spun his keys around his finger.

"People like you are the reason we need a lock on the ice cream freezer." Keith realized Lance was headed for his car, which Lance affectionately called "Blue" and Keith disaffectionately called a deathtrap. "No. We are not taking that thing. Get on my bike."

At the beginning and end of summer, Keith borrowed his dad's pickup truck to haul all his stuff out to camp and then back, but in the weeks between, he exclusively drove his motorcycle. He parked it as far from the lodge as he could, so no children tried to put their hands on it, because he cared more about his bike than he cared about some people.

Now, Lance was looking dubiously at it.

"I don't know how to ride a motorcycle," he said. His consternation seemed to double when he watched Keith straddle the bike, and he pressed a hand over his face.

"You're not driving it," Keith said. "Just get on and hold onto me."

"Oh my god, I'm gonna die," Lance mumbled into his hand.

"You're not gonna die. It's five minutes away and I drive this thing all the time. Get on the damn bike, Lance." Keith started it up, revved the motor once just to make Lance jump and squeak.

When Lance finally stopped dicking around and actually got on the bike, Keith sort of regretted his decision. If they'd taken Lance's car, Keith would have had to put up with the fact that it was a fucking mess, that there were a half-dozen water bottles in the footwell, everything Lance could fit hanging from the rearview mirror, and the terrifying spluttering it made when it turned on. But instead, he had to put up with Lance's chest pressed against his back, his warm arms around Keith's waist, holding on a little too tight.

Or maybe he wasn't, and Keith just couldn't breathe for other reasons.

When he peeled out of the driveway and down the long country roads surrounding the campground faster than the speed limit actually allowed, Lance screeched a little bit and buried his face in Keith's shoulder. Driving too fast may have been exhilarating, but it had never made Keith's heart pound like this.

That five-minute drive, which turned into three, was torture. Lance was too close to him, all of them fitted together, and he was a few inches taller, which made him the perfect height to let him curl around Keith. His knees bumped against Keith's thighs, his hands clutched tight to him, his body and his breath hotter than the summer air.

They pulled to a stop in the parking lot, and Lance relaxed against him, sighing, his face still against Keith's neck. If Keith could, he would've turned around and pulled him closer, so it was probably a good thing he could not.

Keith had enough time while Lance carefully considered all of the Blizzard options to slow his racing heart, and also figure out how to breathe like a normal person again. God, he was gonna have to get it together before the drive back. Maybe tell Lance he didn't have to sit that close. Maybe tell Lance it was alright that he did anyway.

"Yo. Keith. Keeith. What do you want?" Lance asked, apparently repeating himself, because Keith hadn't been listening the first time. Too busy being concerned because he was not appropriately annoyed by Lance literally breathing down the back of his neck.

"What? I thought we were here because you wanted to get ice cream."

"Yeah, dude, I'm getting some for both of us, that was the thing," he said, while the disgruntled-looking Dairy Queen employee, who probably had to deal with camp counselors doing weird shit all the time. Especially if this was everybody's first date spot—shit. Was this a date? No. Lance was way too calm, he had so much energy on any given day, he'd go ballistic if he was on a date.

"Uh. I don't eat ice cream, usually," Keith said, squinting at the menu.

"What the actual hell is wrong with you."

"I'm lactose intolerant, so," Keith said to him, and then addressed the girl behind the counter, who seemed to be getting more annoyed with them by the second. "You guys have smoothies, right?"

"God, I feel like an asshole," Lance said, "I didn't know, man."

"No worries," Keith said, the noise of the blender drowning out the softness of his voice just enough.

They left the store to sit at one of the picnic tables out back, both of them seated on the table with their feet on the bench. Keith was holding a strawberry smoothie that Lance paid for before Keith could grab his wallet, becoming increasingly suspicious that this was a date. Maybe Lance didn't know it was a date. Somehow. Because he was an idiot.

"Dude, I'm super sorry I decided on ice cream without asking," Lance said, extracting the giant spoon from his Reese's monstrosity.

"What? No, it's cool," Keith said. "I mean, I eat it sometimes, because I don't really give a shit, but. I dunno. Didn't feel like it."

His smoothie was basically strawberry syrup and ice, but it was cold, so Keith appreciated that. Lance was eating mostly peanut butter and chocolate and chocolate ice cream. He was also sitting close enough to Keith that his knee kept bumping into Keith's. About four times in the ten minutes it took them to finish off most of their food, Keith almost asked if this was a date, before backtracking and reminding himself that was a weird thing to ask.

Well, Lance seemed to be determined to beat him in the game of weird-question-asking.

"Hey," he said, setting his empty paper cup to the side, because wow, he ate that thing fast. How had he not given himself three brainfreezes? "Keith. Are you into me?"

Are you into me? Yes. The answer was yes. He should have said yes. He should not have said, "what the fuck?" And yet, that was what came out of his stupid mouth anyways.

Lance frowned, then laughed nervously and waved him off. "Never mind. I was just kidding, man."

"Yes," Keith said, finally, before processing what Lance had responded with. "Oh. Wait, why are you joking about that, you asshole, that's weird." And also kind of a dick move, especially when the person you're shooting those non-sequiturs at has a *giant crush on you*. But Lance didn't know that. Except, maybe now he did.

"Wait. What. Yes? As in, yes?" Lance was going full freak-out now, talking with his hands and putting way more emphasis into it than he needed to. Keith thought maybe he was blushing, but it was hard to tell, now that it was actually getting dark out.

"Well, yeah. Sorry, I didn't... I didn't realize you were joking, but, uh. I guess, yeah."

"I wasn't joking," Lance said, like he couldn't have gotten the idea through Keith's head faster. "I wasn't joking. I swear, I just said that because you sort of freaked out, and that's like, I dunno, my defense mechanism." Keith thought back, and that did kind of track. Lance was like one of those poisonous frogs, except instead of poison, it was a terrible sense of humor.

"Then why the hell did you ask that?" Keith asked, jabbing his near-empty smoothie cup accusingly at Lance's chest.

"Because," he started, and then paused like he was actually thinking about what he was saying for once in his life. "Because I'm into you, I guess. It's like, last summer, I thought you hated me and I hated you and we just had this mutual... rivalry thing, going on. And then, this year, I look at you and I think, I think—" He gestured at Keith and opened and closed his mouth once, and explained nothing. "I'm just into you. I don't know why. You're so..." All the while, he leaned closer and closer to Keith, until he trailed off with the two of them inches from each other.

Keith found himself unable to look at anything other than Lance's mouth. Lance bit his lower lip and Keith took a deep breath to steady himself. He felt unsteady anyways. "Kiss me," he said. "For the love of god, just kiss me. You were driving me crazy on that bike, and you've been driving me crazy all summer, just—"

And there it was, the first time Lance ever listened to a single thing Keith said.

— — —

Somehow, the whole camp knew within a week. Lance wasn't surprised—if there was a camp couple whose entire dating history *wasn't* common knowledge, they were doing some next-level subterfuge.

Apparently, Simone and Meghan had been in line for the drive-thru at the shitty Dairy Queen around the same time Lance and Keith started making

out (which Lance hadn't stopped thinking about for an entire week, and that was another issue entirely) and they'd told Allura, who told Hunk, and somebody else overheard, and then Lance stopped caring. He had better things to think about.

For example: dragging Keith into the equipment shed behind the pool and kissing him until the two of them fell into a pile of pool floaties. Additionally: the fact that Keith had to keep his hair down all week until the giant hickey on his neck faded. Also, for consideration: the feeling of the calluses on Keith's hands on his skin whenever Keith dragged his shirt up and pulled him closer and moaned into his mouth and—

Oh. Maybe this was why their rooms didn't have regular doors.

Whatever. If there was a reason for Lance to care about other people finding out he had a super-hot boyfriend, he was having trouble finding it.

He was also having trouble finding his phone, probably because he'd stuffed it in one of the under-the-dash compartments on the speedboat while they took a group of campers water-skiing. They'd finished the actual water-skiing part, and now everybody was just swimming, and with all of them in life jackets, Lance didn't feel like they needed him *and* Allura watching everyone.

And so, if he could find his phone, he was going to text Keith and ask him how climbing things was going. His phone, unfortunately, seemed to have vanished into the depths of the boat. Oh. Wait. There it was. Underneath three separate half-empty bottles of sunscreen.

He already had a text from Keith, who must have either found a break in climbing things or was capable of texting while at extreme heights. Probably the former.

Keith <3

What u doing tonight?

"Why did you even bring that," Allura said, more admonishing him than asking anything.

"Dude. My phone case is one of those waterproof, fireproof, you-could-run-it-over-with-a-truck ones," he said, texting Keith back with, *nothiiiiing. why?*

"That still won't help you if you drop it to the bottom of the lake. It's like twenty feet deep here," she said. Lance wasn't sure if she always sounded like she was right because of the accent, or if she was just always right.

"Okay, well, don't throw it in the lake."

Keith <3

Let's go out.

"Hey, Allura," Lance asked, talking to her back, because she was standing in the middle of the boat, looking like an extremely professional lifeguard. All she needed was a red swimsuit, but she liked pink floral print better. "If a boy is asking you on a date, but you work at a summer camp in the middle of a town that has like three restaurants, one of which is the shitty Dairy Queen, where do you go?"

"Here, probably," she said, re-doing her messy bun flawlessly, like it took none of her attention. "Doesn't everybody go to the lake on second dates?"

"I'm trying not to be a stereotype," he said, but he asked if Keith wanted to go to the lake anyways, because it wasn't like he had any better ideas.

"It's Keith. I doubt you can be."

Keith <3

Lake sounds cool. Tell me what you want from the chinese place i'll pick it up on my way.

"Alright, then, tell Shiro I'm staying here, will you?"

Allura, because she was amazing, dropped Lance off at the beach side of the lake, so he didn't have to walk all the way around from the marina. When he got there, Keith's motorcycle was already parked in the lot, with no Keith on it. Lance found him quickly, a few yards away, sitting at one of

the picnic tables on the grass, facing the lake, his back to the table and to Lance.

Lance tried to sneak up on him, but he was both not very sneaky and too excited to slowly tiptoe over. It was worth getting caught for the brilliant smile on Keith's face, and the little half-wave he got.

"Hey, how was, uh. Whatever you do on boats?" Keith asked, handing Lance a paper carton of lo mein noodles that were probably terrible for you, but the Chinese place was the best dinner option of the three restaurants within a reasonable distance of camp. Also, camp food was probably not much better for you.

"Water-skiing? It was cool," Lance said.

"I don't like boats," Keith said around mouthfuls of food, because apparently, being on a date didn't require them to change their eating habits.

"And I don't like heights," Lance replied, pointing at Keith with his chopsticks, "so we both applied for the right jobs here, yeah?"

"You're strapped in, it's not like you'll fall off a ropes course."

"And it's not like you're going to drown going water-skiing, you have a life jacket. And yet."

"Guess it's irrational," Keith muttered.

They ate in silence for a while, watching the lake. The sun wasn't setting, but it hung low in the sky and extended all the shadows. In the distance, there were still a few boats out, streaking across the surface of the water, but the beach to their right was empty. It usually was; there was a bigger beach about a half-mile down, but Lance liked this one, because the ground shifted up sharply at one point in the shoreline, like a two-foot cliff, and the sandy little beach gave way to a series of boulders just out of the way of the waterline. Lance liked to sit on them, usually when he was hanging out with a couple of friends and talking, but tonight, he didn't stray from the picnic tables, mostly because it would be difficult to lean across the rocks to kiss.

It was easy, here, to lean over and kiss Keith, tucking his face into Keith's neck and pressing his lips to warm skin. Keith laughed and threw a fortune cookie at him. "Read this first, you idiot."

"Are you one of those superstitious people?" Lance asked. "Gotta open the fortune cookie or it's bad luck, whatever?"

"No," Keith said, but it sounded like he was lying. He cleared his throat and then read off his own fortune. "'You will soon experience success in a difficult endeavor.' Okay, that's vague as fuck."

"Mine says, 'you're about to kiss a super hot boy'," Lance said, and then leaned in.

"That's kind of a weird fortune cookie. It said that?"

"No, Keith, I'm flirting with you," he said, and just got a soft *oh* from Keith, who still couldn't quite catch when Lance was hitting on him sometimes. He'd figure it out a second later than he should have, and then he'd go red and awkward for a few minutes before—

Keith put both hands on either side of Lance's face and pulled him in. He was always so *precise* with the way he kissed, like there was a specific set of emotions he was trying to express, and Lance was happy to put his arms around Keith and let him say what he needed to. He was also happy to let Keith sit in his lap and press him back, and sure, the edge of the table was digging into his spine, but Keith ducked his head to kiss Lance's neck, and made a soft noise against Lance's skin. Lance dragged his hands up Keith's sides where they were left bare by the open sides of his shirt. Lance used to think it was stupid of Keith to cut up his shirts like that, especially when it was against camp dress code and he could hardly ever wear them, but he was starting to realize it made it easy for him to feel every detail in the musculature of Keith's back.

Keith had one of the straps of Lance's tank top curled in his fist, so tight he was gonna leave it wrinkled. His opposite hand was on Lance's cheek, holding him in just the right place for Keith to kiss him. He'd moved from

Lance's neck back to his lips, and was kissing him like they would never have to stop.

Lance wasn't any better; he grabbed Keith's ass and pulled him in, feeling him up and immediately forgetting that somebody could wander over at any moment and catch them. It was easy to get distracted, Keith had a *nice* ass, seriously, nobody's butt was supposed to look that good in sweatpants. Keith bit Lance's bottom lip, dragging himself away slowly and grating out an, "*oh, fuck,*" against Lance's mouth.

This was normally the part where Lance would start taking somebody's clothes off, but again with the part where they were in a public park. They were probably being even stupider than those girls who went skinny dipping in the swimming pool in the middle of the night at the end of camp last summer. "We should stop," Lance said, sighing out his reluctance.

Keith dropped his head to Lance's shoulder and groaned, clearly just as frustrated. "God. Why the fuck doesn't our bedroom have a real door."

"Camp Arus itself is trying to sexually frustrate us, I don't know," Lance said, and Keith, who took the whole "we should stop" part as more of a suggestion, pressed another series of messy kisses to Lance's neck.

"Keith," Lance whined, "cut it out." It wasn't like they could sneak off somewhere. The only building in sight was the musty restroom, which hadn't been cleaned in decades and was barely even fit to be used as a restroom. The universe must have been conspiring to make sure Lance didn't get any.

Keith finally did lean away, getting up off Lance's lap and sitting next to him with a grumpy huff. Both of them waited for their breathing to even out, and then Keith said, "Lance. What's happening with us at the end of the summer?" And god, wasn't that a mood-changer?

"What do you mean?" Lance asked, fidgeting with the whistle around his neck, sliding it back and forth on the chain.

"You said after camp is over, people either break up or get engaged, and I'm definitely not proposing to you," Keith said. "No offense."

"Dude, I was exaggerating," he said. "I'm not getting down on one knee after... what, six weeks of dating you?"

"Seven," Keith corrected him.

"Right, seven." Lance leaned back, the edge of the table still digging into his spine, and folded his arms, drumming his fingers on his opposite bicep. "At the end of the summer, I guess, we just keep on, keep on dating." He sat up straight and turned to Keith, gesturing with a little too big a radius for a private conversation. "If that's what you want, I mean! I know it's what I want, after all, I. Well. I can't just assume you'd—"

Keith shut him up with a kiss, gentler than he'd been all night. "Yeah. I want that, too."

"I mean, I know we don't go to the same school, but I'm not that far away —"

Keith kissed him mid-ramble again. God, he was never gonna finish a sentence at this rate.

"You have got to stop doing that, babe."

"You live like twenty minutes from me," Keith said. "I mean, you won't sleep three feet below me anymore, but. Lance. I'm not going away or anything." He sighed, and leaned his head on Lance's shoulder, reaching down to lace his fingers between Lance's.

Was this the first time they'd held hands? It must have been. Lance liked the feeling of Keith's calluses against his palm, and he liked running his thumb over Keith's. He turned his head so his cheek was pressed against Keith's hair, and decided he liked this just as much as the making out.

"I... I really like you," Keith said, like the words were hard to get out.

"I should hope so," Lance said, "with you being my boyfriend and all."

"You dick. I'm trying to be nice." Keith said it without much malice, but he did kick Lance in the ankle.

Lance turned so he could press a kiss to the crown of Keith's head. His hair smelled nice. He'd also borrowed Lance's shampoo. God, Lance must have been beyond far gone, he was *smelling this boy's hair*, for fuck's sake.

He squeezed Keith's hand. "I really like you too, Keith."

The sun started to slip below the horizon, and Lance wondered if they would stay to watch until it was dark. Keith laid his other hand on top of their clasped ones, his fingers feeling over the tendons on the back of Lance's hand. Lance tucked one of his feet behind Keith's, and it rubbed their ankles together, which was the cutest, weirdest thing.

"For the record," Keith said, his voice quiet, making him sound a little raspier than usual. "I still really want to do it."

"Fuck. You can't just say that shit to me," Lance said, overcome by both a full-body shiver and the urge to drop to his knees in front of Keith. "I'm not gonna be able to sleep tonight, I hope you know that."

"Good," Keith said, turning so he could kiss Lance on the cheek. He didn't move away after. "Maybe then you'll be tired enough not to sing Disney songs at breakfast."

"Nothing can keep me from being as loud as possible at breakfast, Keith, you know this," Lance said, leaning in.

Keith pulled his hand from Lance's to put an arm around his shoulders, kissing him again, and again and again, sinking into it. Lance put a hand on the back of Keith's neck, turning until his legs were draped across his lap. Keith kissed him with a little more leisure, like he'd resigned himself to the fact that something was gonna happen that night, but he didn't want to stop making out.

Neither did Lance, so they were in a good place. He slipped his free hand into the open sides of Keith's mangled T-shirt again, just holding him,

fingers on his ribs, enjoying the feeling of Keith's skin against his. Keith pulled him closer, until Lance was leaning against him, sinking his fingers into Keith's hair and summarily ruining his ponytail. Keith reached behind his head to yank the hair tie out, rolling it onto his wrist with movements so well-practiced, he didn't even have to stop kissing Lance to do it.

By the time they parted, the sunset had faded to a pale strip of pink and yellow across the horizon, and it was dark enough that Keith had to flick the headlight on his bike on.

The ride back was torture. Lance was pressed up against his back, his hips pushing against Keith's ass if he so much as moved, and when they got back, Keith wouldn't be able to lean the bike onto its kickstand and kiss Lance while he was still in the seat. Fooling around at the lake was one thing, but there was definitely the tail end of a game of capture the flag happening on the field adjacent to the parking lot, and they probably shouldn't let a bunch of middle schoolers see Keith put his tongue in Lance's mouth.

"I hope you know you've ruined me," Lance said, taking Keith's hand as they walked back to their cabin. Keith didn't let go, just adjusted his grip so their fingers were interlaced.

"What do you mean?"

"I'm having fantasies about your stupid motorcycle. Like, sexy fantasies."

Keith just laughed at him.

"This is *serious*, Keith! I'm supposed to think my car is the sexiest vehicle in the world, not your... your *goddamn bike*." The last few words came out in a whisper, just in case there were any impressionable children who didn't know what "damn" meant wandering around. Or in case Shiro was around to hear him swearing where impressionable children might be eavesdropping.

"*Your* car?" Keith asked. "Are you sure? Your car's like, the furthest thing from sexy, Lance."

"Blue is a beautiful lady," Lance protested.

"Uh-huh. Fine, you can go make out with your Corolla, then," Keith said, and he might've convinced Lance he was actually mad if he stopped holding his hand.

He didn't.

— — —

"I want to take you on a date tonight," Keith had told Lance at breakfast, stopping him mid-way through his and Hunk's duet rendition of *the Circle of Life*. Apparently, Lance McClain stopped singing Disney songs at breakfast for one thing only.

He'd been so excited he spent the rest of breakfast trying to pester Keith until he told him what his date plans were. Keith was still proud of himself for managing not to say anything, even when Lance leaned in, put a hand on his thigh, and said, "*please?*" right into his ear.

On second thought, there was no way that should've worked for Lance, because Keith had been far too busy going red and stammering to answer him.

Lance didn't see him much for the rest of the day, and he sat with Hunk and Matt's cabin at lunch, so there was no opportunity for him to pry the information (which, honestly, wasn't very exciting) out of Keith.

Once dinner was over and they were officially on break for the night, Keith texted Lance and asked him to meet at their place, then made his way up to the garage instead of down to the cabin. He'd talked Shiro into letting him take one of the camp trucks out into the woods, on the excuse that they weren't gonna need them for the evening, anyway, and Keith was a better driver than most of the staff, and he even though he wasn't technically qualified to drive camp vehicles until age twenty-one, he only had four months until he would be.

In the end, Shiro only agreed to let him have it for the night when he learned Keith was taking Lance on a date. Apparently, Shiro was a sucker for young love. Or whatever they were.

Earlier, Keith had piled his sleeping bag and a bunch of blankets and pillows in the bed of the pickup truck, along with some of Lance's that he'd borrowed without asking, hoping Lance didn't go up to their room in the meantime and wonder who the hell decided they should move out. Keith also had some stuff thrown in the backseat of the truck—citronella candles and a cooler with a couple bottles of that really fancy root beer Lance liked. Keith sort of wished he'd been able to get them actual beer, or a bottle of wine or something, because it might make him feel less like a stupid kid doing cheesy romantic shit.

He took it slow down the gravel driveway to their cabin, so that by the time he got there, Lance was already standing out front. He was, for once, wearing something that wasn't a tank top with a stupid slogan on it and a pair of swim trunks or shorts that could be used as swim trunks—instead, he was dressed in a pair of running leggings with those short-shorts over them, and... was that one of Keith's shirts? Yeah, it was definitely that long-sleeved black tee with Keith's high school's logo printed across it.

Lance was looking down at his phone, like he was waiting on a text from Keith, paying the truck no mind until Keith beeped the horn a couple times at him and leaned out the window. "C'mon, get in," Keith hollered, and Lance brightened and ran around the front of the truck to climb into the passenger seat and greet him with a kiss.

"Are you allowed to drive this thing?" Lance asked, drumming his fingers on center console.

"Technically, no," Keith said, as he headed up one of the access roads the maintenance crews used to get out to the archery course and the outdoor ropes. "But I asked Shiro nicely."

Lance laughed and poked around in the glove box, pushing it shut when there wasn't anything interesting in there. "Are we going out to the ropes

course? Because it's gonna get dark soon, and that seems dangerous, and also, you *know* I'm afraid of heights."

"No, we're not doing that," Keith said, "that would definitely be against some rules."

"Then where are we going?" Lance reached over to lay his hand on top of Keith's on the gear shift, which he was still holding onto even though the truck had an automatic transmission.

"You'll see," he said, and Lance squeezed his fingers once.

"Has anybody ever told you how damn impatient I am? Because I get the feeling you don't know."

"It's like a ten-minute drive, Lance."

"Cool, then I have ten minutes to guess. You have to tell me if I'm right, okay?"

"Guess away, but I'm not gonna tell you."

He did, and his series of guesses included the bridge over the creek (can't stop the truck there, nobody would be able to drive around us), that one pond (standing water, Lance, it's full of mosquitoes), and, "are you *sure* it's not the outdoor ropes course, Keith?" (no, Lance, we passed the trail to that already).

They drove out past the high-adventure outpost, the campsite with the actual log cabins, no plumbing, and no electricity. Shiro and some of the other counselors who could stand a week without showering set it up to take a couple of groups of teenagers who were a little old for the typical camp experience, and they'd go white-water rafting and ziplining and shit when they weren't hoping it wasn't gonna rain so they could cook over a fire.

Keith hadn't taken him up on that one. He liked real camping, but part of the reason he liked it was not having to deal with a bunch of whiny teenagers.

The trail got thinner past the currently-empty outpost, and Lance rolled up the window so he didn't get smacked in the face with overgrown branches. The truck did fine off-road; that was part of the reason the camp owned it, but it still jolted when the path got particularly rough, and it made Lance squeak and almost fall out of his seat.

Keith would've told him to put his seatbelt on, but they were approaching the clearing he was looking for. The truck rolled to a stop just in front of an enormous oak tree, the one they'd had somebody come out and inspect that one time. Apparently, it was five centuries old. It was also kind of awesome, branches twisting in every direction, wrapping other trees up in its hold as they fought to grow around it.

"We're here," he said, turning the engine off, leaving the keys in the ignition and the doors unlocked. As he exited the truck, he heard the passenger side door slam, and Lance ran around the front of the truck until he was standing at Keith's side.

"Wow," he said. "I can't even make fun of you for taking me on a date to see a tree, this is kind of awesome." He fit his arm around Keith's waist, pulling him close until he could tuck his head against Keith's shoulder. Maybe it was the woods around them and the darkness setting in, but it reminded Keith of that time he'd spent half a night hike nearly hugging Lance and trying not to lose his mind.

This time, though, he could run his hand in slow circles on Lance's lower back, and he could tilt his head up to kiss Lance's temple. "It's not just the tree thing," he said. "I have like. Actual plans. Other than looking at trees."

"This sounds exciting," Lance said, releasing him so that he could climb back into the front seat of the truck, reaching into the back for the cooler and the pair of candles back there. "Candles?" Lance said, as soon as he noticed them. "This is all very romantic, Keith."

"They're citronella candles, they're just to keep the bugs away," Keith said, hauling himself into the bed of the truck, then reaching out a hand to help Lance follow him. "C'mon."

Lance was a little less graceful than Keith, nearly falling on his face trying to get in the truck, but hey, he wasn't the one who went around climbing shit all day long.

"Oh wow, you have like, blankets and stuff out here," Lance said, sitting down and peeking in the top of the cooler. "Hey! I like these."

"Yeah, 's why I got them," Keith said, his back to Lance as he lit the candles and set them on top of the cab. They didn't provide much light, but his eyes were adjusting to the darkness, and Lance didn't mind if Keith sort of fell into his lap trying to sit down. He just moved his soda bottle out of the way and laughed, kissing Keith's hair loudly.

"This is great," Lance said, leaning back against the pillows while Keith unscrewed the top on his soda. It was too sweet for him to drink fast, so he set the lid back on top to keep any curious insects from climbing inside. Lance put an arm out, inviting Keith to settle in against him, and Keith took a brief moment to watch Lance's face before looking up at the sky, which was going a deeper blue.

"It's still early, so you can't see that many," Keith said, "but I wanted to take you stargazing."

He worried into the pause for a second, because stragazing was kind of cheesy, but Lance cheered, "dude! That's awesome!" and Keith settled down. "Wow, you're like... really good at this boyfriend thing," Lance said.

Keith snorted out a laugh. "Sure, Lance."

"I'm serious," Lance said, leaning his cheek against Keith's head. "This is really sweet. Thanks for bringing me out here."

Keith hummed, a soft *mm-hm*, and toed his shoes off, kicking them away. After Lance had done the same, Keith curled around him completely, Lance's legs draped over his thighs, his head just over Lance's heartbeat. It didn't take long for Keith to be so overcome with affection, it fizzled in him like nervous energy, and he threw his arm around Lance's waist, squeezing him tight for a second.

"I'm, um, I'm really glad you like it," he said. "I've never had like, a serious boyfriend before, so. I kinda don't know what I'm doing."

"You're good at improvising," Lance said, his fingers in Keith's hair, stroking through slowly. It made Keith want to fall asleep instead of looking at the sky.

There was a clink as Lance set his (probably empty) bottle down, resting his now-free hand on Keith's shoulder, thumb following the seam on his flannel. "God," Keith sighed, turning to press his lips to Lance's chest for a second. "I'm so fucking glad we got over our bullshit and got together."

"Me too," Lance said, his voice thick with emotion, like he was about to cry. Keith panicked for a second, but then Lance leaned down to kiss him fiercely, his mouth tasting like sugar and sasparilla. Keith kissed him back with equivalent passion, his arms around Lance's shoulders, pulling him down until Lance was resting overtop him on the blankets, his body-weight warm like his mouth.

Keith wondered if it was too early to say he was in love.

Probably, yes. But if you considered the two summers he'd spent nursing his unwanted affection for Lance, maybe it wasn't.

Instead of using his words, Keith put his hands on either side of Lance's face and pulled him into a series of kisses that was dramatically intense, like if they were in a movie, the music would swell and the camera would pan around them. Lance's hands found Keith's hair again, brushing it from his cheek so it couldn't get stuck between their mouths.

Lance's cheeks were hot when Keith ran his thumbs over them, and even if it was too dark for Keith to see him blushing, he liked that he could feel it. They parted for just a second, enough time for Keith to tilt Lance's face up so that he could kiss his neck, his mouth tracing a path from jaw to collarbone. Kissing Lance's neck always drove him crazy, and sure enough, he was breathing heavier and grabbing for Keith's hands so he could hold onto him. Keith had been thinking, abstractly and then not quite so abstractly, that if they were going to have sex—*when*, not *if*—this was how

he'd start it. He'd have his mouth on Lance's neck, sucking bruises that everyone was damn well gonna see, because Lance did most of his job shirtless, and then—

And then.

That was the part that got him, the part that made him clench his fingers around Lance's so tight he worried it hurt, and he had to concentrate to unlock them. Keith curled around Lance as much as he could with Lance just laying there next to him, only overlapping his body from the waist up—he would've it if Lance had a thigh between his.

"Keith." His name came out of Lance's mouth in a way that was barely a word, more a feeling.

Keith pulled away from Lance's neck just enough to say, "yeah?" and it gave Lance the second he needed to tilt Keith's face up and press their mouths together again. Keith ran his fingers over the marks he'd left on Lance's neck and Lance moaned against his mouth, high and uneven.

Keith opened his eyes, and he saw Lance's cheek, the curl of his hair at his ear, and, behind him, a splatter-painting of stars and planets across the sky. "Lance," he said, "look."

Lance rolled off of him and turned so he could see the sky, blinking up at the starscape a few times, obvious amazement in his expression. Keith stopped watching the stars and started watching their reflection in Lance's eyes instead.

"Whoa," Lance said. His breath still hadn't evened out, and he had one hand clasped around one of Keith's. "It's beautiful."

"I know, right?" Keith shifted closer, so that they lay on their backs next to each other, Lance holding Keith's hand over his chest.

"Keith, you doofus," Lance said, squeezing his hand, "this is the part where you're supposed to say, 'yeah, you are' or something."

"I thought I just made that pretty obvious," Keith said, tapping the side of Lance's neck, not exactly hitting the spot where the hickey was, but close enough to be indicative.

"Actions speak louder than words, with you," Lance noted. He curled in toward Keith a little, pulling Keith's hand to his mouth so he could kiss his knuckles like Keith was some kind of fairy-tale princess. "You're not wearing your gloves."

"I don't always wear them."

Lance hummed against the back of Keith's hand. "I know," he said, "I just like your hands on me, that's all."

Heat coursed through him as he thought of all the particular ways he could put his hands on Lance. "Do you?" he asked, because he couldn't come up with anything else besides *I'm thinking about grabbing your ass*, and Keith still had enough of a mental filter to dodge that one.

"Keith." Lance let go of his hand to put an arm around him, hugging him close. "What are the odds somebody could roll up out here and find us?"

"Night security doesn't drive out this far," Keith said. He'd asked. It had been awkward, especially the part where the night guard, who was a giant guy that nobody ever saw and was always grumpy at breakfast, asked him why he wanted to know.

"So," Lance proposed, "we could do whatever we wanted."

"Depends. What do you want?" Keith's heart hammered so fast he could feel it in his throat. He was betting on Lance to answer something stupid like *climb that giant tree*.

"Well," Lance said, pulling the hem of Keith's shirt halfway up his ribcage. "I wanna do a whole lot more than make out with you."

— — —

Shiro must've figured out that they didn't return the truck until quarter after two, because at the staff campfire that Friday, he leaned over to Keith and said, "do I want to know exactly what you did in my truck?"

Lance burst into laughter, clapping his hands over his mouth and doing a poor job of stifling it when Keith glared at him and went bright red.

"Nothing," Keith said. "Stargazing," he elaborated.

Handjobs, Lance did not add.

Shiro leveled Keith with a particularly knowing look.

"Shut up," he said. "I'm gonna go tell your boyfriend you're harassing me."

He didn't, because Matt would tease him even worse than Shiro would. Instead, he leaned into Lance's side, burying his face in Lance's neck and groaning something about wanting to throw himself in the lake. And Keith said he wasn't the dramatic one.

"Oh, come on," Lance said, bending his head to whisper, "you weren't the one who had to walk around shirtless with a buncha teeth marks on your neck."

"Oh. Sorry," Keith said, looking sheepish, taking a step back from him.

"No, no, it's fine, I just wanted to bitch, come here," Lance said, taking his hand, keeping him from putting any more distance between the two of them. Keith's smile was softer in the firelight, so sweet that Lance wanted to lean in and kiss him, regardless of the sidelong looks they were gonna get, regardless of the ones they were already getting. Sure, everybody knew they were dating, but Keith was a private person, and he didn't want the whole camp knowing everything about his relationship, so Lance kept the gushing about his cute boyfriend to a minimum until the weekends, when Hunk got the full force of Lance's affection for Keith.

"Wanna go make some marshmallows wrong?" Keith asked, and Lance elbowed him in the side.

"I maintain that you make them wrong. It takes too long, and the point of cooking anything over a fire is—"

"That you don't burn it."

Lance shook his head, squeezed Keith's hand. "Whatever," he said, sitting next to him on one of the huge rocks circling the fire pit, which technically existed as a border to keep anyone from getting too close, but usually served as seating. Lance put a hand in the crook of Keith's elbow, watching the flames curl and spit sparks while Keith took way too long to cook a marshmallow.

Once Keith finished his extensive cooking process, he constructed a s'more and handed it to Lance, who took it, balancing it between two fingers to keep the chocolate from dripping onto his fingers. "That one's yours," Keith said, "so you can confirm that my technique is better."

"Oh, your 'technique'. I know all about your technique, Kogane."

Keith's eyes narrowed, like he was trying to figure out whether that was an innuendo or not. He didn't ask (smart, Keith), and sat back down next to Lance, playing with the frayed edges of Lance's cut-off shorts.

"Hey, so, I have a question for you," Lance said, licking melting marshmallow off his fingers and absolutely *loving* the way Keith's eyes followed his tongue.

Keith paused for too long, still looking at Lance's mouth, then cleared his throat. "Uh, okay. What?"

"My family does this reunion every summer, and it's the weekend after camp ends," he said. "It's like, chill, I mean, as chill as fifty-some people hanging out in my uncle's house could be, so, maybe it's not chill, but I wanted to know... do you wanna come with me?"

"Are you asking me to meet your parents?" Keith opened his hand so his palm rested on Lance's knee, watching him for a response with the kind of intensity Lance had come to associate with Keith.

Lance fidgeted with the ends of the friendship bracelet Hunk made for him while his campers had arts and crafts. "Yeah? Yeah. I mean, you don't have to tell me now, we're not even halfway done with the summer, but. I think they'd really like you. Also, if I tell my mom I have a boyfriend and she doesn't get to meet you like, immediately, she might kill me."

Right around the word 'boyfriend,' Keith's lips twitched into a smile. "Yeah, I'd like that."

Lance hugged him so hard, they nearly fell over, which would've been a disaster, because the ground around them was gravel. Somebody laughed behind him, and Lance distinctly heard Pidge screech, "PDA, guys!" but he didn't care when Keith leaned in to kiss him.

Besides, what was a summer camp crush without a kiss by a campfire?

Author's Note:

Been drawing a bunch of summer camp AU stuff on tumblr @luddlestons